

■ DEMAND

# De Lille halts state-owned land disposal citing new approach

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PUBLIC Works Minister Patricia de Lille has put a freeze on the sale and disposing of state-owned land that was put out to tender just before the May 8 general elections.

Independent Media has learnt that the Good Party leader wants to consult with other relevant ministers whose portfolios have a direct interest in these pieces of land.

In an interview, De Lille said an inter-ministerial committee was expected to meet to discuss how the

land would best be put to use for public benefit.

Departments of Human Settlements, Agriculture and Rural Development and Land Reform will be part of the process.

De Lille said: "We are the custodians of public land, buildings and the first priority is that these should be used for public good. We would like to give the first option to the relevant departments, they need to be consulted before any disposal is aligned to the priorities set out by President Cyril Ramaphosa and to spatial transformation and integration." The process would take a bit of time but De Lille said the initial meeting would

be held in the next two months.

Just before the national elections in May, the Public Works Department put out a tender for a long list of plots identified throughout the country.

When De Lille took over as minister she stopped the process, signalling a new approach to land and on how the government intended on handling the disposal of land it owned.

In the Western Cape alone, vast tracts of plots were included in the list, including areas such as Cape Town, Mossel Bay, Oudtshoorn, Paarl, Piketberg, Plettenberg Bay, Riversdale, Robertson, Saldanha, Caledon, Kynsna, Morrees-

burg, Porterville, Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Tulbagh, Vredendal, Worcester, Wolsely, Betty's Bay and Bredasdorp.

De Lille's move has been welcomed by land researchers and organisations fighting for access to land and affordable housing.

Researcher at the University of Western Cape's Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (Plaas), Professor Ruth Hall, said the move reflected government's decision to use well-located and undeveloped public land in cities for low-cost housing as well as for urban agriculture and other public uses, rather than selling off to private developers.

She noted the decision also came after city councils such as Cape Town had been privatising public land amid an outcry from homeless and landless lobby groups.

"While the land debate over the past year has tended to focus on the demand for rural land, including but not only for farming, it's also clear that there's an urgent and growing demand for urban land.

"Land reform can no longer be equated with farming, and will have to respond to the variety of land needs of all South Africans. Minister De Lille, having faced these pressures over public

land while mayor of Cape Town, now has her work cut out to chart a new approach to dealing with state land held by public works, and to deal with state-owned enterprises that have substantial well-located and undeveloped landholdings," Hall added.

The Development Action Group (DAG) also welcomed the decision and called on De Lille to make a commitment to release public land for social and affordable housing.

"A key instrument will be using local emerging contractors and developers to realise scale of delivery," said DAG's executive director, Adi Kumar.